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Spy Case Reports Seen Changing Little in Israel

Pollard Affair Is Now Closed, Shamir Says

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JERUSALEM, May 27—Politicians and political commentators predicted today that there will be no major political repercussions and no heads will roll as a result of two critical official reports by panels looking at Israel's role in the Jonathan Pollard spy affair that were released yesterday.

Israel's Cabinet met this morning and quickly adopted the recommendations of one of the two reports, prepared by a commission headed by Tel Aviv lawyer Yehoshua Rotenstreich. That report is considered the less consequential of the two because it concluded that the entire government, rather than specific Cabinet ministers, was to blame for the affair, in which Israeli operatives recruited and paid a U.S. Navy intelligence analyst to supply them with American defense secrets.

The other report, by a subcommittee of the Knesset, Israel's parliament, directed criticism at four top government leaders, but neither called for specific actions against them or against a number of lower-ranking civil servants singled out by name.

"You don't punish people here, you don't execute people here," said a senior official, speaking not for attribution and reflecting a tendency in this small, security-conscious state to band together in self-protection. "If the outcome of these reports is that in the future we'll be a little bit more careful, then we achieved something."

The two reports contained stinging criticisms of Cabinet ministers Yitzhak Rabin and Moshe Arens and lesser criticisms of Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, accusing them of failing to supervise properly the small intelligence unit that conducted the spying operation in the United States. In that operation, Pollard, recruited in 1984, sold U.S. defense secrets to operatives of the Scientific Liaison Bureau until his arrest in November 1985. Pollard is serving a life sentence for espionage.

But both reports exonerated political leaders from the lingering accusation that one or more of them must have been aware of and approved the Pollard operation while it was taking place. Officials said they hoped this finding will satisfy American critics of the affair and ease the pressure from Washington for further steps against those responsible.

"It's what we call '*parve*'—not really meat and not really milk, but something in between," said another official, assessing the impact of the two committees' findings. "It's not a whitewash but not very hard-hitting either. People felt they had to go through the motions, they did and now it's over. This is as much as this particular government can provide."

Nonetheless, both reports leave many unanswered questions. They make no mention of the government's alleged policy against spying in the United States, nor do they address Pollard's contention that he was asked to obtain "black information" on Israeli leaders. They also do not explain how it was that Pollard's information did not arouse the curiosity of the various ministers who had access to it.

Several Cabinet ministers objected to the formulation of collective guilt contained in the Rotenstreich report approved today, and three reportedly voted against the report.

"How can you expect the minister of agriculture or the minister of religious affairs to share responsibility on this kind of security matter?" asked Ezer Weizman, a minister without portfolio. He pointed out that major decisions in the affair after Pollard was exposed and arrested were made by the ruling leadership—Shamir, Peres and Rabin—and not by the Cabinet at large.

Shamir, however, told reporters that the Cabinet's acceptance of the panel's report closed the matter. "In our view, this is the end," he said. "I hope we won't have to concern ourselves further with this affair."

The Rotenstreich panel's finding appeared satisfactory politically—"When everyone is guilty, no one is guilty," said one commentator—but it differs from those of previous government commissions, including the 1982 inquiry into the massacre of Palestinian refugees at the Sabra

and Shatila camps in Beirut. That inquiry concluded that besides collective governmental responsibility, individual ministers must also bear the blame for actions within their ministries even if they were unaware of them.

The Rotenstreich report has been ridiculed, however, because it is widely known that political leaders pushed Rotenstreich—who was in Zurich at the time—to release it yesterday in order to counteract the harsher findings of the Knesset subcommittee.

But the report of the Knesset subcommittee, headed by former foreign minister Abba Eban, also came in for criticism. By blaming four senior ministers—two each from Labor and Likud, Israel's major political blocs and rival partners in the governing coalition—the panel appeared to guarantee no one would be singled out for attack. It made no recommendations for their dismissal.

Analysts said this "balanced" finding was predictable since Knesset members run for their seats on a central-party slate rather than from individual districts. If they fall out of favor with the party leadership—in this case the people whose performances they were required to judge—they could forfeit their places on the slate in next year's election.

One possible political casualty, however, could be Eban, who has been roundly attacked by Peres and Rabin, leaders of his party, for his role in heading the panel.

Eban enjoys wide popularity in the United States but has a very small political constituency here. "No one in the States cares about this subject anymore," said one supporter of Rabin. "Now is the time for Mr. Eban to be worried."